

COMESA Ministers of Gender vow to unleash wealth creation potential in COMESA women

Ministers Responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs from the COMESA region have resolved to adopt a proactive approach towards coming up with viable initiatives that are targeted at empowering women economically. The Ministers vowed to initiate new practical and result oriented programmes and projects that will unleash the wealth creation potential of women in the region.



The Ministers from Burundi, Djibouti, Kenya, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe made this resolution at their annual meeting held in the tourist town of Victoria falls in Zimbabwe from 6 to 7 May 2010. The theme of the meeting was "Harnessing Science and Technology for Development" with the sub theme being "Bridging the Gender Digital Divide".

The Guest of Honour at the meeting Hon. Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga, who is the Zimbabwean Minister of International Cooperation and Regional Integration, mentioned culture as the single most critical

issue that keeps surfacing as the main obstacle to women and men in the African societies enjoying equal opportunities to developmental agenda.

"Many injustices against women have also been committed in the name of culture. Women and youths have been denied access to property, financial services, business opportunities, even education in the name of culture. In some of our societies, for a woman to have a loan, or land she requires a male guarantor," Minister Mushonga said.

She appealed to her fellow Ministers to consider those

culture practices that could be promoted to advance equal participation of men and women and youths in development work, gender equality and economic empowerment in order to achieve decent standards of living for all peoples.

"The vision of COMESA is to attain sustainable growth and development of member states can only be promoted when there is more balanced and equitable sharing of resources, including knowledge with the inclusion of men, women and youths," Minister Mushonga added.

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COMESA Making strides towards Women Empowerment – Ngwenya

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The Secretary General of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Mr Sindiso Ngwenya has explained that COMESA's support to women entrepreneurs has over the years taken many forms. In the most recent past, COMESA has mobilized resources to support women's incubator projects in collaboration with NEPAD. The recently established NEPAD/ Spanish 500, 000 Euros Fund will support pilot projects under the Business Incubator for African Women Entrepreneurs. This fund will support all COMESA countries with demonstrated potential to grow in handicrafts for export, agro-processing and ICT.

Mr Ngwenya made this explanation in his address to the fourth meeting of Ministers Responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs held in Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe.

"As you are aware the COMESA

Integration Agenda has progressed in leaps and bounds since the establishment of the predecessor institution the PTA in 1982. Along the way, there has always been recognition on the need to maintain a Gender perspective to COMESA programmes. It was for that reason that the COMESA Gender Policy was adopted in 2002," Mr Ngwenya pointed out.

At a micro level, COMESA has established a Simplified Trade Regime in 2000 to enable small scale cross border traders to benefit from the COMESA Free Trade Area. Under this regime, women who constitute the bulk of cross border traders can move their goods free of duty and taxes across borders without the need to obtain the other complicated documentation.

The Secretary General revealed that another important aspect of COMESA's initiative to promote gender equality and women empowerment in trade

and regional integration is the establishment of trading houses. The purpose of trading houses is to enhance the access by women to intra and extra COMESA markets.

From the COMESA perspective, the intervention in gender issues is view in three main key areas. Firstly, COMESA recognises that it is important to mainstream gender in the key integration objectives of COMESA which revolves around market integration in the wider sense. Secondly, COMESA considers it important to intervene on key challenges that could impede regional integration and also affect the efforts of member states to attain the MDGs, and that being HIV/AIDS. Thirdly, COMESA established the first regional Association for women in Business known as FEMCOM in 1994 as part of its strenuous efforts to support women entrepreneurs because without women entrepreneurship "market integration will not be fully realized. The FEMCOM Secretariat has since been established in Malawi with an Acting Executive Director in place.

On the First Draft HIV/AIDS Multi-sectoral Programme, Mr Ngwenya commended the Swedish/Norwegian governments for the generous support adding that the desire of COMESA is to see that the war against HIV is sustained and eventually won in every way possible.

Malawi Strategizes On Cotton and Clothing

For three days of 21st – 23 April 2010, in Blantyre, Malawi, illuminated the dark and complex cotton value chain of Malawi. For the first time, in a long time, the faces of the key players in the cotton sector of Malawi shone with hope and poise to bring back the long lost glory where cotton used to feed people, feed industries and dress Malawians. Thanks to COMESA and USAID who facilitated the largest cotton stakeholder meeting of recent times in Malawi. The objective of the meeting was to take stock of issues of the sector that would be the focus in the development of Malawi Cotton to Clothing Strategic Plan, 2011-16, that will align to the COMESA Regional Strategy on Cotton to Clothing Value Chain that was approved by the COMESA Council of Ministers in Victoria Falls in June 2009.

The Malawi cotton stakeholder meeting which was officially opened by the Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade, Mr. Steven Kamwendo, attracted the participation of farmers and farmer's organizations, input suppliers, researchers, policy makers, ginners, oil crushers, financiers and spinners. The meeting was also graced by the international cotton players such as the African Cotton and Textiles Industries Federation (ACTIF), the International Trade Center (ITC) of Geneva, and the Ethiopian Cotton Farmers and Ginners association.

The meeting, which was held, just two days after the signing of the Malawi CAADP Compact, underscored the importance and priority that cotton possesses as enshrined in all the key policy documents of Malawi. The Malawi

CAADP regards cotton as one of the most important cash crops that has the potential to significantly contribute to foreign exchange earnings after tobacco.

Through a SWOT Analysis the stakeholders identified and discussed key binding issues of the sector, including poor access to proper inputs, poor and unguaranteed market for seed cotton, lack of cotton market information, policy rigidities, lack of legal frameworks guiding the sector and contract farming, high loan defaults arising from high interest rates, stringent collaterals and lack of legal framework checking defaulters. Amidst heated debate, it became apparent that every part of the value chain had identified their shared weaknesses and strengths, and vowed to address them in the context of the identifying opportunities that lie ahead of the sector.

Through group discussions, the stakeholders agreed on seven main pillars of the sector, namely: Production, Policy and Regulation, Trade and Market Access, Research and Extension development, Institutional and Capacity Building (including Gender, HIV and AIDS and Environmental mainstreaming). These pillars and the respective activities identified would guide interventions into the sector in transforming Malawi's cotton sector into a competitive and sustainable integrated cotton sector contributing to economic growth, equitably benefiting all stakeholders.

A factory visit on the last day at MAPETO Company, Malawi's largest textile manufacturer, was an eye opener to those who had not seen the complexities of the garment manufacturing process.

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The Ministers who were joined by senior officials from the Ministries and Ambassadors pledged to remain united and present a united force when dealing with issues of gender and women's affairs in the 19-member bloc.

At the same meeting, the Ministers decided that the draft framework of the COMESA Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit should be reviewed at country level to enable local stakeholders to be consulted. A sub-committee of experts consisting of five countries is to be established to review the framework.

The time frame for the implementation of the COMESA Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines should be aligned to the COMESA Strategic Plan of 2011-2015. National Central Statistics Offices in COMESA States should be urged to come up with sex (Gender) disaggregated statistics to facilitate the monitoring of gender gaps in all sectors of development.

The Ministers also urged the COMESA Secretariat to form strategic partnerships with multilateral and bilateral partners in promoting women entrepreneurship and in development of a regional training programme.

Britain, appoints its first ever special Representative to COMESA

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Tuesday 4 May 2010 witnessed a their joint accreditation to COMESA by the British High Commissioners to Zambia Tom Carter and Carolyn Davidson. The two became the first British special representative to COMESA

Speaking at the presentation of the letter of accreditation Mr Carter said that in so doing the two would become the first fully accredited UK's representative to COMESA "this is a sign of UK Government's appreciation of the strong partnership with COMESA, which has matured over the years. It also recognizes that COMESA has been the driving force for integration and realizing the African Union vision"

Mr Carter said that around 80 percent of poverty alleviation in recent years has been ascribed to growth in trade and yet Africa, with 42 percent of the world's population, only accounts for three percent of global trade.

"African countries trade more with Europe than they do amongst themselves. The World Bank estimates that poor quality of infrastructure inhibits economic growth in Africa by two percent per year," he added that transport costs in southern Africa area are 75 percent higher than in Europe and up to 40 percent higher than in other developing countries.

"These are considerable challenges which can only be addressed by a regional approach. The UK has worked closely with COMESA to address these challenges, for example through DfID's regional trade facilitation programme and in its work on the North-South



Tom Carter and Carolyn Davidson presenting credentials

Corridor," he said.

Mr Carter said UK's support to the one-stop border post in Chirundu is a further example of tackling the problems of infrastructure. He welcomed the role of COMESA-EAC-SADC tripartite task force in helping set the pace and form of regional integration. THE United Kingdom Department for International Development (DfID) has given 33 million pounds COMESA, EAC) SADC tripartite task force to facilitate creation of a Free Trade Area (FTA) from Cape to Cairo and Tripoli.

Speaking at the same event COMESA Secretary Mr. Sindiso Ngwenya noted that the COMESA-EAC-SADC tripartite taskforce with the support of DFID, has established a tripartite infrastructure Trust Account, hosted by the Development Bank of Southern Africa with grant funding of 67 million pounds to support infrastructure under the North South Corridor projects.

He added that the launch of the FTA for the three regional blocks is

scheduled for 2012.

Secretary General Ngwenya said over the past five years, COMESA has benefited from UK aid through the regional trade facilitation programme.

Mr Ngwenya also cited COMESA regional competition commission housed in Malawi as one of programme supported by DfID. He said the COMESA-EAC-SADC tripartite taskforce aims to deepen regional integration through harmonisation of regional economic programmes in trade policy, trade facilitation and infrastructure.

He applauded the UK for their support, which in January 2010 was further strengthened by a Memorandum of Understanding the chief executives of the tripartite task force signed with DfID.

Mr Ngwenya said the MoU was followed by a conference in March 2010 on 'Joining Africa', hosted by DfID in London to bring on board other bilateral development partners, regional and multilateral development banks



Simplified Trade Regime launched at the Malawi, Zambia Border

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) bloc in collaboration with the Governments of Malawi and Zambia launched the Simplified Trade Regime (STR) at the border of Zambia and Malawi known as Mwami Border Post on 30th April 2010.

The COMESA Simplified Trade Regime is one of the important programmes to facilitate trade and reduce poverty. It recognises that cross-border trading is an important source of employment in this era of high unemployment and is an income generating activity that sustains families.

Cross border trade has proved to be a very important activity in ensuring supply and access to basic needs by the border communities. Cross border trade aides in overcoming the obvious hurdles of larger commercial trading by reaching out to remote communities with food stuffs, groceries, equipment and many other items in smaller quantities thereby contributing to food security and economic well-being.

The Simplified Trade Regime is applied to consignments valued at \$500 or less. It has three components.

- **Firstly:** a simplified certificate of origin, which is documentary



evidence for originating goods from member country;

- **Secondly:** a simplified customs document, which will support data capture and statistics for government policy review, formulation and management; and
- **Thirdly:** a common list of products to be traded between two countries under this regime.

Zambian Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry Mr Felix Mutati launched the STR with the Malawian Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry Mr Steven Kamwendo and COMESA Assistant Secretary General in charge of Programmes Mr Stephen Karangizi. The Malawian High Commissioner to Zambia H.E Chrissy Mughogho and the Zimbabwean Ambassador to Zambia H.E

Lovemore Mozemo attended the launch together with several and local dignitaries from both countries.

Mr Mutati said the launch of the COMESA STR would largely formalise trade between the two countries.

Speaking during the launch at Mwami/Mchinji Border, Mr Mutati said the two countries had shown their political determination to assist small traders through the launch of the STR.

"I am urging small-cross border traders to abandon the use of illegal ways such as smuggling but begin to formalise their trade by carrying their goods over the borders," Mr Mutati said.

The Minister advised customs officers at both the Mwami and Mchinji borders against asking small scale traders to pay duty on agreed goods worth



Simplified Trade Regime launched at the Malawi, Zambia Border

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6 less than \$500 saying doing so would be a breach of regional integration.

The ministers of trade in the two countries would in future consider expanding the list of eligible products and introduce a higher limit of consignment from the current one.

“We don’t want our traders to remain small-scale for years. We want them to move from small-scale to medium and large enterprises,” Mr Mutati said. Minister Kamwendo said the launch of the STR would go a long way in mitigating poverty among small traders between the two countries.

There was need for the two countries in the COMESA region to enhance their business strategies.

He noted that small-scale traders faced a lot of challenges in trade such as spending more time to clear their goods at borders. Mr Kamwendo said the Malawian Government believed that enhanced trade integration was key to achieving sustainable food security and economic development.

“Today marks the end of these problems which our small-scale cross borders have been facing,” he said.

In his speech, COMESA Assistant Secretary General Stephen Karangizi described the COMESA STR as one of the important

programmes to facilitate trade and reduce poverty. It recognizes that cross border trading is an important source of employment in this era of high unemployment and is an income generating activity that sustains families.

“COMESA’s objective is to improve the standard of living of its people through expanding markets, trade and competition. Cross border trade has proved to be a very important activity in ensuring supply and access to basic needs by the border communities.”

“Cross border trade aids in overcoming the obvious hurdles of larger commercial trading by reaching out to remote communities with food stuffs, groceries, equipment and many other items in smaller quantities thereby contributing to food security and economic well-being,” Mr Karangizi pointed out. Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe were the first three COMESA countries to agree on the list of common products which can be traded under the Simplified Trade Regime.

The Assistant Secretary General also noted that the STR through the use of the simplified Customs Document will help in capturing the much needed and elusive statistics for cross border trade.

Speaking on behalf of the donor community, Head of the

European Union Delegation in Malawi Ambassador Alexander Baum said that his organization believe in regional integration adding that they have pumped in 10 million Euros into the Regional Food Security and Risk Management Programme (REFORM) which being managed by COMESA Secretariat and is spearheading the STR.

REFORM specifically aims at improving regional and national trade, social protection and disaster risk management.

And one component of this programme is to enhance cross border trade in agricultural commodities. The programme is implemented by COMESA.

“A stable and uninterrupted demand for food from neighbours will result in farmers in surplus regions investing more to ensure long term supply. The aim of this programme is to help small traders increase the supply of locally produced food crossing borders. Today Zambia and Malawi are the first countries to introduce this new trade regime, soon to be followed by Zimbabwe and Malawi in May,” Ambassador Baum revealed.

Cross border associations from Malawi and Zambia were represented and they both support the STR. They appealed to the governments to expand the list wider.

ACTESA discusses agricultural productivity investments with US partners



Approval Committee of India, the Inter American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the African Seed Trade Association and the French Professional Association for Seeds and Seedlings. The BIGMAP Conference provided a good forum to discuss policy and regulatory issues around genetically modified agricultural products.

At the Pioneer Hi-Bred campus, Dr. Muyunda had the opportunity to be briefed on the innovations in improved seed breeding and production. Specifically, Pioneer highlighted its Improved Maize for African Soils (IMAS) project under which a maize variety that can take up and use nitrogen from depleted soils more efficiently requiring less fertilizer use is being developed. The IMAS project involves several partners in Eastern and Southern Africa including the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI).

The COMESA Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA) delegation led by Dr. Cris Muyunda last week visited the State of Iowa in the United States, one of the biggest agricultural producers in the World. The delegation, visited the Seed Science Centre at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa, and presented a paper on the status of seed trade in Eastern and Southern Africa at the "Food, Feed and Fuel for the World: Seed and Biotechnology" Conference held by the Biosafety Institute for Genetically Modified

Agricultural Products (BIGMAP) of Iowa State University. Dr. Muyunda, and the delegation also held high level discussions with the Vice President of the US's premier seed company, Pioneer Hi-Bred, at the Pioneer Headquarters in Johnston, Iowa.

The BIGMAP Conference held 28-29 April, 2010, was attended by global authorities in agricultural policy and productivity improvement including AGRA, USDA, US State Department, American Seed Trade Association, USAID, the Genetic

Dr. Muyunda requested US partners to work with stakeholders in Eastern in Southern Africa to build a viable seed industry that will reach large numbers of smallholders in order to raise agricultural productivity, boost regional trade and increase rural incomes.

France present Credentials to COMESA



COMESA Secretary General Sindiso Ngwenya this week (4 April 2010) received credential from says from the French Ambassador to Zambia Mr Olivier Richard as the new France special representative to COMESA.

Mr Ngwenya said France has continued to support less-developed countries, among them COMESA member states.

"We know that France's Official Development Assistance increased from 7.56 billion euros in 2008 to 8.92 billion euros in 2009, which represents 0.46 percent of its gross national income in 2009, compared to 0.39 percent for the previous year," he said.

He said France was the first non-African states to accredit a representative to COMESA and that since then, the French government has supported regional integration through financial contributions to the European Development Fund, from which COMESA has benefited.

Ambassador Richard said France is supportive of organisations which work towards the integration of Africa.

He said regional and African integration is a positive evolution and that he is happy to have been nominated to work with an organisation as dynamic as COMESA.

